

**Minutes of CRASC Technical Committee Meeting
April 15, 1999
Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center
Turners Falls, Massachusetts**

Agenda Items

1. Call to Order and Approval of Minutes from the Meeting on September 28, 1998

Mr. Jay McMenemy, Technical Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:15 a.m.

Mr. Steve Gephard motioned to approve the Minutes from the last meeting, Ms. Cori Rose seconded and the Minutes were approved.

2. Action Plan Update

Ms. Janice Rowan reported that the draft Action Plan had been revised according to the recommendation made by Commissioners at the last CRASC meeting. The revised draft has been reformatted and the general substance is in place. The Technical Committee is looking for the Commissioners to endorse the format (and make substantive comments if applicable) before the subcommittee finalizes the draft for CRASC review.

3. Shad Studies Subcommittee

Mr. Ken Sprankle provided an update (attached) noting that the 1998 shad run had been estimated at 640,000 shad with low commercial and recreational takes. The 1998 juvenile index for shad was down significantly from last year reflecting flood conditions in the river last June. Shad allocations for the coming season have been made including plans to transfer at least 1,000 shad from Holyoke to the Vernon pool. Passage efficiencies will be studied this spring at the Turners Falls project with the intent of identifying actions to modify and improve fishway structure and operations there. Additionally, revision of the existing shad plan will be discussed in the fall.

The blueback herring run in the Connecticut River was very low last year though runs elsewhere in coastal New England streams were good. Though the population may be higher than the numbers observed, there is still concern that the dip may be related to the increased striped bass population in the lower river. There was also some discussion on new information that shows the bluebacks are a significant bycatch in the commercial Atlantic herring fishery. Trap and transfer options, similar to those implemented on the Merrimack River, were discussed as a possible means of increasing the blueback juvenile index through production in upstream tributaries.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation has deferred a decision on funding the clupeid conservation grant proposed for the Connecticut River/Long Island Sound Ecosystem until fall.

4. Farmington River Fry Survival Ad Hoc Workgroup Update

Mr. Steve Gephard provided a summary of the ad hoc committee investigation into last season's low Farmington River fry survival. The bottom line is that data did not support the theory that poor survival was the result of egg incubation protocols at the White River NFH. Fry resulting from eggs incubated under similar regimes will be stocked and monitored more closely throughout the basin this year to see if there is any consistent survival relationship. It was agreed that the Fish Culturist Subcommittee could take charge of any further incubation investigations.

5. Fish Culturist Subcommittee

Mr. McMenemy announced the formation of a Fish Culturist Subcommittee. The Subcommittee was formed to improve communications between hatcheries and to address specific charges by the CRASC and Technical Committee. It was agreed that the Subcommittee would be responsible for selecting their own Chair. The first meeting of the Subcommittee is scheduled for April 16 in Hadley, MA.

6. Update on Atlantic Salmon Studies

Mr. McMenemy provided an update on studies planned for this season.

U.S. Generating Company (USGen) will again radio tag returning adult Atlantic salmon at the Holyoke dam, releasing them upstream and tracking their movement to determine whether passage at the #2 dam on the Deerfield River is justified. Last year, just three fish made it to the dam (four fish is the trigger). USGen will provide cooperators with an extra receiver to track movement of the salmon elsewhere in the basin. The USFWS-Sunderland OFA also has two receivers that can be used to collect additional data.

This project generated considerable discussion: It was agreed that USGS-Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center would supply paint and a paint mark system (syringe) to Normandeau Associates to mark the anal fin of all of the radio tagged salmon to help fishway monitors recognize these fish. This is important because the plan is to release all radio tagged fish. The monitors are to note the passage of these fish in their daily logs, but not to double count the return.

It was also agreed that USGS-Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center would supply Texas Instruments PIT tags to Normandeau Associates for interperitoneal injection. These tags will be utilized to collect additional information on passage routes and timing since PIT tag readers will be deployed in the river for collection of data in other studies.

Normandeau, Whittemore, and Cronin personnel were reminded to take scale and DNA samples. Hatchery personnel also need to check all returning fish for PIT tags, scanning the entire body. Handling bags with hoods were also recommended for anyone capturing sea runs since the hood helps calm the fish and facilitates examination. CTDEP should be contacted for more information if there are questions about hooded bags.

Ten kelts from the Richard Cronin NSS were released at the mouth of the Chicopee River in January. Nine of the kelts were control fish at the hatchery and one was a Normandeau fish that swam back to the Westfield River twice. All of the fish were released post-spawning because they had never been vaccinated. The fish were PIT tagged, adipose clipped, and T-tagged with a light blue tag. The Normandeau fish retained its radio tag. Fish monitors were reminded to look out for these fish, release them, but note it in the log. They will not be added to the total count this year.

The Coordinator agreed to provide fishway monitors with a diagram depicting the types of adult marks that they may encounter this year with instructions for handling the various fish.

Mr. McMenemy also reported that the Northeast Utilities System/Sunderland OFA/Greenfield Community College/Conte Refuge smolt mark-recapture study will be conducted again this spring. The mark goal is 3,000 fish, starting date is April 21.

The Index Station smolt estimate for 1999 is up 20% from last year and is the highest outmigration ever estimated for the river. [1998 estimate = 285,000; 1999 estimate = 340,000]

Ms. Cara Campbell will continue to maintain the database she developed if cooperators provide her with the data.

An estimated 6.7 million fry will be stocked this year (down from 9.1 million last year). Cooperators cut the densities rather than the amount of habitat stocked. CTDEP planned to begin stocking today, MAFW planned to stock this weekend, and VTFW planned to stock next weekend.

7. Fish Passage Issues

Mr. John Warner provided a summary of hydro/passage issues (attached). Notably, results for passage at Northfield were good; and, the FERC draft Environmental Impact Statement for Holyoke will be released for comment shortly.

Mr. Steve McCormick made a suggestion to the Technical Committee regarding the use of hatchery and wild smolts in studies. There were problems last year with fish not moving and some concern about whether they were smolts or not. He suggested that guidelines were in order to (1) monitor fish for smoltification, and (2) set release and handling treatment protocols. The Technical Committee requested and Mr. McCormick agreed to draft guidelines for the Salmon Studies group to review.

8. Pittsford Smolt Stocking

Mr. Steve Gephard reported that 21,142 1-year smolts were trucked out of the Pittsford NFH and released by CTDEP. Mr. McCormick had monitored these fish and determined that 65% were smolts. They ranged in size from 15.8 fish/pound to 16.3 fish/pound. All were marked by an adipose fin clip. Other fins were in excellent shape with the exception of some erosion on the dorsal fin. The fish were spooky which was thought be a good sign. The majority of the fish were stocked

in the mainstem Farmington River. About 20% of the fish (4,500) were stocked at Rainbow dam with 3,000 smolts placed directly in the Rainbow fishway and 1,500 smolts placed in imprint ponds. Those fish held in the imprint ponds were not fed until yesterday and then they were ambivalent with regard to feeding. The next meeting of the ad hoc smolt advisory group will be in June though the date has not been set.

Mr. Gephard was reminded to include the Coordinator in correspondence for the advisory group, the same as for any other subcommittee or group associated with CRASC or the Technical Committee.

9. Other Business

Fish and Egg Requests:

Previously, Mr. Jon Truebe was approved to take 375 smolts for studies at Lower Village on the Sugar River; Mr. Ben Letcher was approved to take 6,000 excess 0+ parr from WRNFH; and, the Northeast Fishery Center was approved to take 1,600 fry for a U.V. study.

The Technical Committee approved a request by Mr. McCormick for 1,000 parr from WRNFH; and, a request by Mr. Alex Haro for 50 wild smolts from Holyoke for an acoustic tag release program. Jon Truebe subsequently requested an additional 375 smolts for the Cavendish study.

Stocking:

Mr. Ken Gillette reported that 3,900 DNA marked smolts would be released into the White River in the near future. These fish will be marked with an adipose clip.

Ms. Rowan acknowledged the Deerfield/Millers River Chapter of Trout Unlimited for arranging the donation of 200 five-gallon buckets with lids for fry stocking. The buckets were donated by Mr. John Clementi of Plastics, Inc., in Leominster, MA.

Returns:

Ms. Michelle Babione reported that the fish return numbers for 1998 (attached) had been updated to correct some reporting errors.

Returns will again be reported Monday through Friday on the Coordinator's Fish Returns Hotline at 413/548-9628. Weekly updates will be Emailed and hopefully also posted on the Website at <http://www.fws.gov/r5crc>.

The Holyoke fish window will be open to visitors May 5, Turners Falls will open on May 12 providing fish are present and both will close June 21.

CTR/LIS Ecosystem Fish Passage Subteam:

Ms. Babione also provided copies of the minutes from the Connecticut River/Long Island Sound Fish Passage Subteam (attached). A Steering Committee was formed to manage project selection and coordinate activities. Roles for the group were defined to include serving as a clearinghouse for projects, securing block grants especially from private funding sources, and providing technical

assistance to facilitate fish passage projects. Additionally, the group agreed to proceed with the NFWF Clupeid Block Grant proposal. A project selection matrix was developed with a list of potential projects.

Connecticut River Joint Commissions Update:

Ms. Rowan reported that the January informational forum to address needs identified by the CRJC Fish, Wildlife and Habitat Action Team was canceled due to scheduling problems at the proposed meeting site. The CRJC has proposed to reschedule the meeting on October 20, 27, November 3 or 10.

The CRJC Action Team also identified a need to better inform local and seasonal residents about natural resource management issues. Ideas on what needs to be conveyed have been discussed in conjunction with USGen plans for updating exhibits at their five fishway visitor centers. Meetings have been scheduled to address changes and improvements specific to each visitor center. The dates and locations of meetings are as follows: Wilder-June 10 (8 a.m.-1 p.m.), Moore-July 20 (9 a.m.-1 p.m.), Bellows & Vernon at Bellows-August 17 (9 a.m. - 1 p.m.). A September date is likely for the Deerfield Project.

Research Forum:

Ms. Rowan reported on the Connecticut River Migratory Fish Restoration Forum that was held February 4, 1999. Eighty-seven people attended. Thirteen speakers presented papers that ranged from flood effects on salmon survival to business-owner opinions of the restoration program. Abstracts from the forum have been printed in the U.S. Atlantic Salmon Assessment Committee Report No. 11.

Sea Run Releases:

Mr. Caleb Slater, MAFW, proposed releasing 10% of the sea runs that return to DSI on the Westfield River. The fish will be trucked upstream and released above the Knightville Dam. Monitoring, including limited summer snorkeling and fall redd counts will be conducted with assistance from the Westfield River Watershed Association and the MAEOEA Westfield River Watershed Team. Mr. Gephard suggested that many of the benefits of these releases are derived from public awareness and encouraged public outreach in conjunction with these releases. Mr. Dan Call, Connecticut River Watershed Association, reiterated the Association's interest in helping including assisting with publicity. The Technical Committee then approved the proposal.

Herring Fishery:

Mr. Gephard announced that CTDEP had closed all tributaries to taking of river herring, effective immediately and until further notice. He noted the mainstem fishery was not closed. The action was prompted by declines in the herring population thought to be caused by striped bass predation.

USFS Research Branch:

Mr. Steve Roy described the Forest Service Research Branch, in the past, as a funding presence through the University and Conte Lab. In the future, a research fishery biologist will be hired and stationed at the University of Massachusetts. The position will be filled this summer.

10. CRASC Meeting Agenda Items

The Technical Committee did not add any items to the agenda for next week's CRASC meeting.

The Coordinator motioned to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Gephard seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at about 2 p.m.

Technical Committee Meeting Attendance

Janice Rowan	USFWS
Steve Gephard	CTDEP/Fisheries
Jay McMenemy	VTFW
Ken Sprankle	NHFG
Steve Roy	USFS
Ken Gillette	WRNFH
Doug Aloisi	USFWS
Steve McCormick	USGS/BRD
Curt Orvis	USFWS
Steve Rideout	USFWS
Dan Call	Westfield River Watershed Assoc.
Caleb Slater	MAFW
Tim Hess	VTFW
Richard Thomas	Northeast Utilities
Annemarie Averill	USFWS
Ben Letcher	USGS/BRD
Don Pugh	UMASS
Jon Truebe	Lakeside Engineering
Mickey Novak	USFWS
Phil Herzig	USFWS
Michelle Babione	USFWS
Larry Lofton	USFWS
Joe McKeon	USFWS
John Warner	USFWS
Cori Rose	NMFS